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C O N F I D E N T I A L SECTION 01 OF 02 JAKARTA 000875

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SUBJECT: POLITICAL ISLAM - RADICAL GROUP TRIES TO GAIN
TRACTION

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AKARTA 812

[1](#)B. 08 JAKARTA 2014 AND PREVIOUS

Classified By: Pol/C Joseph L. Novak, reasons 1.4(b+d).

[1](#)1. (C) SUMMARY: Hizbut Tahrir Indonesi (HTI) is one of the most active radical Islamis groups in Indonesia today. While claiming to be non-violent, HTI supports the formation of a Muslim "Caliphate" and espouses anti-Western views. Despite the group's limited inroads into some mainstream groups, the vast majority of Indonesian Muslims practice a moderate form of their faith. Meanwhile, in a further sign of political Islam's relative weakness, Islamic-oriented parties suffered a sharp setback in recent parliamentary elections. While small, HTI is active and needs to be watched, however. Mission continues to work hard on outreach to Indonesia's Muslim community, including via targeted assistance. END SUMMARY.

RADICAL GROUP PRESSES ITS CASE

[1](#)2. (C) A radical Islamic group is trying to pick up traction in Indonesia. HTI is a transnational movement which advocates the imposition of Islamic law and the return of the Islamic "Caliphate." The group is not conservative in thinking per se as it accepts the importance of "modernist" technical and scientific skills (as opposed to single-minded reliance on sheer religiosity or spiritualism). Its support in Indonesia comes primarily from urban middle-class intellectuals and university students. Sidney Jones (Amcit--please protect) of the International Crisis Group estimates that HTI has around 50,000 active members with 1.5 million sympathizers.

[1](#)3. (C) HTI, which is secretive and guarded, does not provide exact membership figures. Ismail Yusanto, a HTI spokesperson, has said the organization distributes approximately one million HTI bulletins weekly through mosques. The group reports to have branches in all of Indonesia's provinces, and regional offices in 300 cities and regencies. It is also active on university campuses.

[1](#)4. (C) HTI began informally in Indonesia in 1982. In 2000, it launched itself as a formal organization and held its first "International Caliphate" conference in Jakarta drawing 5,000 supporters. The conference was covered extensively in the media, which helped spur the group's activities and membership efforts. By 2007, HTI's national conference drew 100,000 supporters into Jakarta's main sports stadium.

[1](#)5. (C) The group claims to be non-violent, promoting the

implementation of Sharia law through peaceful religious outreach and indoctrination. Effective in media advocacy, it publishes a weekly bulletin, a monthly journal (aimed at young professionals and students--HTI claims 100,000 paying readers), and a women's booklet (the HTI women's wing was highly successful in advocating for the recently passed anti-pornography law). It also organizes numerous seminars and conferences--primarily in Jakarta--where it brings together a diverse group of speakers to events. Abu Bakar Bashir (Jemaah Islamiyah co-founder) and Health Minister Siti Fadilah Supari are among the noteworthy who have participated in HTI-sponsored events.

AN IMPACT ON MASS MUSLIM ORGANIZATIONS

¶16. (C) HTI is having some impact on moderate Muslim organizations. Sources within the country's two largest mass mainstream Muslim organizations, Nahdlatul Ulama (NU) and Muhammadiyah, say HTI members have joined their organizations and helped effect debate. (Note: NU and Muhammadiyah are two of the largest Muslim organizations in the world with over 80 million members combined.)

¶17. (C) The impact can be seen via a growing (if still limited) influence, which appears to be greater within Muhammadiyah. Experts say Muhammadiyah is more susceptible to such influence due to its philosophy which includes orthodox strands of Islamic thought plus more modernist aspects (a juxtaposition similar in some ways to HTI's philosophic moorings). This has roused some concerns in Muhammadiyah leadership circles. Reacting to reports that some members of the Central Board were HTI sympathizers, Muhammadiyah Chair Din Syamsuddin responded by forbidding executive board members to hold leadership positions in

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multiple organizations.

¶18. (C) NU is seen as not quite as susceptible to HTI influence. It has a robust boarding school (pesantren) network, which provides students with a more tolerant understanding of Islamic ideas. Classified as "traditionalist"--highly influenced by ancient Javanese spiritualism and mysticism--NU is a socio-religious organization, deeply rooted in local custom. Insiders say the biggest threat to NU comes from students studying in the Middle East and returning with radical views. In reaction to concerns re HTI, NU leaders recently issued a warning letter to all chapters stating that members of key bodies are strictly forbidden to hold key positions in either HTI or Front Pembela Islam (FPI)--a hardline group.

¶19. (C) HTI has links to another key organization. Observers claim that HTI has ties to the Indonesian Council of Ulama (MUI), a quasi-governmental governing body responsible for issuing fatwas (religious edicts). HTI advocacy may have influenced MUI's edicts denouncing pluralism and branding the Islamic sect Ahmadiyah "deviant." HTI has some links with Indonesia's large Islamic-oriented parties. Some hardline members of the Prosperous Justice Party (PKS) are suspected to have connections with HTI, for example.

¶10. (C) Despite its claims to support non-violence, HTI has links to some thuggish groups. HTI, for example, uses the Islamic Followers Forum or Forum Umat Islam (FUI)--a hardline anti-Western group--to garner mass support. Lobbying efforts by both the FUI and HTI paid off with the recent passage of the anti-pornography law--which liberal Indonesians see as a threat to civil liberties. HTI has also frequently colluded with the radical extreme group Islamic Defender's Front (FPI), but has no known structural connections.

A GROUP TO WATCH

¶11. (C) HTI is having an impact--but a limited one. The vast majority of Indonesians practice a moderate form of

Islam. Moreover, political Islam in general is not doing well here. Islamic-inclined parties, for example, suffered a sharp setback in recent parliamentary elections (see ref a). The impact on the country's two largest mass Muslim organizations by extreme groups like HTI needs to be watched closely, however. In addition to its robust outreach efforts, Mission supports capacity building among a broad range of Muslim groups--including NU and Muhammadiyah--aimed at increasing mutual understanding and building trust.

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